



# *To Be Somebody in America: Ellis Island Immigrants Tell Their Stories*

## Teacher Guide



12.08



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## On the cover:

*Arriving at Ellis Island.* Photograph marked with number 5252. Property of the Statue of Liberty National Monument, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior.



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*For all oral histories, see computer disc or visit this website:*

[www.nps.gov/npnh/forteachers/curriculummaterials.htm](http://www.nps.gov/npnh/forteachers/curriculummaterials.htm)



## What Every Teacher Needs to Know

We welcome your class to the National Parks of New York Harbor Education Center!

**Program Location:** The program takes place at the NPNH Education Center on Staten Island, a fully accessible site located on the third floor of the old Army barracks at 210 New York Avenue in Fort Wadsworth. Classes can eat lunch either at our **Learning Lunchroom**, where children learn about recycling, or at an outdoor picnic area. (Food, vending machines, microwaves and refrigerators are *not* available.)

**Cancellation Policy:** If your plans change, please contact us *as early as possible*.

**Teacher and Chaperon Roles:** In our program, *everyone participates*—including teachers and chaperons! You are *essential* to the success of this program. That is why we **REQUIRE one adult for every six to eight students** to attend with your class. Please give chaperons the **Chaperon Job Description**, found on the left side of this folder, prior to the day of the trip.

**Questions:** Please contact us at (718) 354 – 4530, extension 223. We also welcome email. A business card is provided in this packet with a Park Ranger’s name, number and email address.



## Program Overview and Objectives

### Overview

In this program, *To Be Somebody in America: Ellis Island Immigrants Tell Their Stories*, students read edited oral histories from immigrants who passed through Ellis Island Immigration Station from 1892 until it was closed in 1954. Teams of students then perform dramatic skits based on the personal stories of these immigrants. Activities are deeply rooted both in language arts and in social studies curriculum and standards.

### Essential Question

What are the elements of a “successful” immigration experience to the U.S.?

### Objectives

Students who participate in the program and activities (pre- and post-visit) will be able to:

- List circumstances and personal characteristics that make an immigration experience successful or unsuccessful.
- List at least three requirements for immigrants to enter the U.S. via Ellis Island.
- Compare and contrast experiences between two or more immigrants.
- Create and perform a short dramatic performance based on an oral history.
- Use a graphic organizer to understand a text.



## On-Site Program Description

*This program requires students to read two edited oral histories before your visit. Groups that arrive without reading these primary sources beforehand will not be given a program at the Center upon their arrival.*

All students must read the oral history by immigrant Doukenie Bacos. Then, after dividing your class into four teams, each team should read its “own” oral history from the list on page . Teachers may choose which oral history student teams will read, or the choice can be left to the student groups. During your visit, student teams will perform each of these stories as a dramatic presentation.

This program is based on powerful *primary sources*—oral histories by Ellis Island immigrants themselves. Transcripts have been edited to make them shorter and easier to read, but they are the real words of real participants in history. Reading oral histories not only exposes students to rare primary sources, but enhances literacy skills as well.

Reading these primary sources also makes history personal. Each immigrant had his or her own motivation for coming to the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Usually their motives were complex: escaping persecution, war or economic hardship, wanting more personal freedom or more political rights. Students develop an appreciation that personal choices are always intertwined with history—indeed, that their own choices are intertwined with today’s current events.

### What is an oral history?

Oral histories are interviews where people tell their own stories in their own words. The Oral History Project at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum began in 1973 and continues to this day. Nearly 2000 immigrants have given interviews so far. Most were processed through Ellis Island. Many have passed on, but their stories survive thanks to this project.

After each team has performed in front of the class, we will revisit the essential question: *What are the elements of a successful immigration experience to the U.S.?* What elements made the experiences of some immigrants more successful than others? Which of the immigrants would they rank as “successful” or “unsuccessful”? How might this compare to what immigrants experience today?



## Summary, Pre- and Post-Visit Activities; Classroom Extensions

### **Required Pre-Visit Activity: Students Read Two Oral Histories**

(See computer disc or find at the webpage [www.nps.gov/npnh/forteachers](http://www.nps.gov/npnh/forteachers) )

Doukenie Bacos (Doo-KEN-nee BAH-kos) was a woman of Greek ethnicity who immigrated to the United States as a teenager in 1921. The entire class must read her oral history *in class, before their visit to the Center*. When you visit, students will use this oral history to **create and perform short dramatic skits**. Knowing Doukenie's story beforehand will greatly increase students' confidence as they create their skits.

Teachers must also divide the class into four groups. Each group will read its "own" oral history from the selection listed on page 10. Either teachers or students may select which oral history each group will read.

### **Post-Visit Activity: Arriving at Ellis Island (pp. 11-12)**

This handout is a **primary source document** that describes an immigrant's experience of Ellis Island. Our **Document-Based Questions (DBQs)** use a format similar to the DBQs found on state social studies tests. Students can answer the questions individually or in small groups.

### **Post-Visit Extension: Create a Student Oral History Project (p. 14)**

Reading an oral history makes history real for students. An even richer experience is for students to conduct their own oral history interviews with a subject. Gathering oral histories also helps students gain both content and skills in a rewarding, provocative manner.

### **Additional Activities Available on Our Website**

([www.nps.gov/npnh/forteachers](http://www.nps.gov/npnh/forteachers))

### **Handout: The Immigrant Who Ran Ellis Island**

This handout builds student understanding of immigration to the U.S. during the period that Ellis Island was used as an immigration station (1892-1954). Edward Corsi was ten years old when he and his family immigrated through Ellis Island from Italy in 1907. In 1931, he was named to head the Ellis Island Immigration Station, the first immigrant chosen for the position.

### **Activity: Students Research Original Immigration Documents**

Students can find out more about immigrants through their own research of primary documents. *Ship manifests* can be found online, while *petitions for naturalization* and *declarations of intention* require visiting local National Archives offices. We tell you how.



## Vocabulary of Immigration Terms

- Alien:** A person from another country who does not have the rights of a *citizen*
- Citizen:** A person who has all the rights and freedoms of a country—to work, vote, etc.
- Deportation:** Removal of an *alien* from a country, often because they arrived illegally
- Depression:** A time of low wages and few jobs. The *Great Depression* started in 1929.
- Emigration:** To leave one's country forever
- Greenhorn:** (*Insult*) An *immigrant* not familiar with the ways of his or her new country
- Immigration:** To move permanently to a new country. People who do this are *immigrants*.
- Literacy:** Being able to read and write. After 1917, required for alien men entering the U.S.
- Passport:** A document that allows a person to enter and leave a foreign country
- Pogrom:** Attacks against Jewish communities in Russia during the 1800s-early 1900s
- Quarantine:** (*verb*) To isolate a sick person in order to stop a contagious disease from spreading. (*noun*) A place for sick people, to keep them from spreading disease.
- Quota:** Any limit, set by law
- Quota laws:** Laws passed in the 1920s to restrict immigration based on nationality
- Settlement house:** A place that offers services for *immigrants*—classes, sports, job counseling
- Ship manifest:** A list of passengers on a ship. Includes name, age, destination, place of origin.
- Steerage:** “Third-class” passengers on a ship who traveled below deck in crowded rooms
- Tenement:** An apartment building with low standards of health, safety and comfort
- Trachoma:** A very contagious eye infection that can lead to blindness if not treated.
- Vermin:** Small, harmful insects, such as fleas or lice, that thrive in unsanitary conditions
- Visa:** A document that allows a person to go to the border of a country and ask an immigration officer for permission to enter.





## Vocabulary of Dramatic Terms

These definitions came from students who had visited the NPNH Education Center. Try to blend these elements into your dramatic performance.

<b>Actors</b>	People who portray a character
<b>Audience</b>	The people who watch a dramatic performance (a play or a movie)
<b>Blocking/staging</b>	How an actor uses their body onstage, especially in relation to other actors
<b>Cast</b>	All the actors in a performance
<b>Character</b>	The role an actor takes on during a performance
<b>Costumes/makeup</b>	Clothes, jewelry—anything worn by actors to help them play a character
<b>Cues</b>	Reminders to do something at a specific moment during a performance
<b>Gesture</b>	A physical movement, like waving hello or carrying a suitcase
<b>Lighting</b>	Uses light to focus attention on an actor or part of a stage
<b>Motivation/feeling</b>	What makes the character do certain things on stage, like making a certain gesture or talking in a particular tone of voice
<b>Music/sound effects</b>	Sounds that help set the mood of a performance—say, birds singing—or that help advance the plot, such as a gunshot
<b>Plot</b>	The basic plan of a story or dramatic piece (example: Rich man dresses up as a bat and avenges his parents' death by fighting crime.)
<b>Props</b>	Things used on stage to help set the mood or advance the plot (example: a vase with flowers on a table; a suitcase)
<b>Script</b>	A written text with the lines of all actors, plus stage directions
<b>Stage/set</b>	The place where the dramatic performance takes place, which helps define time and location of the drama using scenery, etc.
<b>Stage directions</b>	Cues on where to move or what gestures to make on stage (examples: exit stage left; pretending to chew gum)





## Pre-Visit Activity, Part One: Oral History of Doukenie Bacos

*Part One of your program requires that ALL students be familiar with the oral history of Doukenie Bacos (Doo-KEH-nee BAH-kos, below).*

Doukenie Bacos, a woman of Greek ethnicity, immigrated to the United States in 1920-21 at the age of 15. She mentions several reasons why she left her family's home in Turkey. Her oral history reveals a determined, intelligent and underage immigrant who overcame many obstacles. Oddly, her story ends at the climax, when she faces a bleak choice: marry one of her uncle's middle-aged friends or return home in failure. "Sell myself?" she asks the interviewer. "I would rather drown." The National Park Service has recently uncovered what happened to her—as you will find out during your visit to the Center!



Photo: Bacos/Bazaco Family

- As students read, they should jot down answers to the questions that divide each section. They can do this either individually or as a group, depending upon reading level. **NOTE:** Questions at the start of the oral history tend to be the easiest. As you get closer to the end, questions become more abstract and require a higher reading and comprehension level.
- Discuss Doukenie's story in class. (You may want to write some highlights on the board.)
  - The circumstances and reason(s) *why Doukenie left for America*.
  - The events that happened on her *journey to America*.
  - The events that happened to her *at Ellis Island*.
  - Have students *predict* what happened at the end. Did Doukenie have to marry one of her uncle's friends? If not, what do you think she did instead? Do you think she had a successful immigration experience, or not?
- As a class, fill out the **graphic organizer** on the last page. Although graphic organizers are used in New York state language arts tests, students may be unfamiliar with this tool.
  - Fill in the blanks at the top of the page—her country of origin (Turkey); her age when she immigrates.
  - What led her to decide to go to America? (New York state standards call this *push-pull*.) She gives several reasons. These go in the boxes on top of the page.
  - Her decision to go to America is already on the graphic organizer.
  - What happens to her *at Ellis Island*? (She does not get to leave right away. Why not?)
  - What happens *after her arrival*? At first, she thinks her life is going according to plan. But her uncle changes her plans. List these events in the boxes at the bottom of the page.
- For Part Two of the program, see the next page.



## Pre-Visit Activity, Part Two: Each Team Reads Its “Own” Oral History

Part Two of your program will *require* that, before coming to the program, students be selected by the teacher into four teams. Before coming to the program each of the four teams will read one of the edited oral histories (*below*). Either teachers or students may choose which team reads which of the four selected oral histories.

### Oral Histories by Nation of Origin and Year of Immigration

FROM	IMMIGRANT	YEAR	COMPELLING STORY
AUSTRIA	Nelly Ratner Myers	1940	Deaf Jewish girl escapes the Holocaust
BARBADOS	Vera Clarke Ifill	1921	Black immigrant faces poverty, prejudice
CHINA	Gem Hoy “Harry” Lew	1951	Waits at Ellis Island two months to join family
CROATIA	Paul Frkovich	1950	Illegally enters U.S.; bicycles from Argentina
GERMANY	Otto Heinemann	1930, 1933	Twice enters U.S. illegally, once as stowaway escaping Nazi officials
IRELAND	Mary Margaret Mullins Gordon	1925	Detailed description of Irish Civil War and processing through Ellis Island
IRELAND	Emanuel “Manny” Steen	1925	Denied a job in the U.S. because of his religion
ITALY	Josephine Garzieri Calloway	1922	Spends a year at Ellis Island’s hospital for treatment of her <i>trachoma</i>
ITALY	Leo Manzone	1921	Illiterate brother denied entry to U.S.
LEBANON	Richard Herbert	1913	Mother and children escape from father to U.S.
SWEDEN	Linnea Hallgren	1924	“Feeble-minded” sister denied entry to U.S.
UKRAINE (RUSSIA/POLAND)	Barbara Barondess	1921	Jewish family escapes <i>pogroms</i> , revolution
UKRAINE (POLAND)	Mary Slobojan Nerstad	1922	Americanization eased by kind teachers
UKRAINE (ROMANIA)	Louis Winnick	1922	Knowledge of English forces him into almost a parental role for Yiddish-speaking parents

## Post-Visit Activity (DBQ): *Arriving at Ellis Island*

Although he was a British citizen, writer **Stephen Graham** lived in Russia and wrote in Russian. He wrote ***With Poor Immigrants to America*** after arriving at Ellis Island with a shipload of Russian immigrants. (English translation by Macmillan Company, New York, 1914)

The day of the *emigrants*' arrival in New York was the nearest earthly likeness to the final Day of Judgment, when we have to prove our fitness to enter heaven... It was the hardest day since leaving Europe and home. From 5 A.M., when we had breakfast, to three in the afternoon, when we landed at the Battery, we were driven in herds from one place to another, ranged into single files, passed in review before doctors, poked in the eyes by eye-inspectors, cross-questioned by the pocket-inspectors [and] vice detectives...



*Arriving at Ellis Island. Photo: National Park Service (NPS).*

Nobody had slept the night before. Those who approached America for the first time stood on the open deck and stared at the lights of Long Island. Others packed trunks...

At seven o'clock, our boat lifted anchor and we glided up the still waters of the harbor. The whole prow [deck] was a black mass of passengers staring at the ferry-boats, the distant factories, and sky-scrappers... the green-grey statue of Liberty [was] far way and diminutive [small] at first, but later on, a celestial [heavenly] figure in a blaze of sunlight...

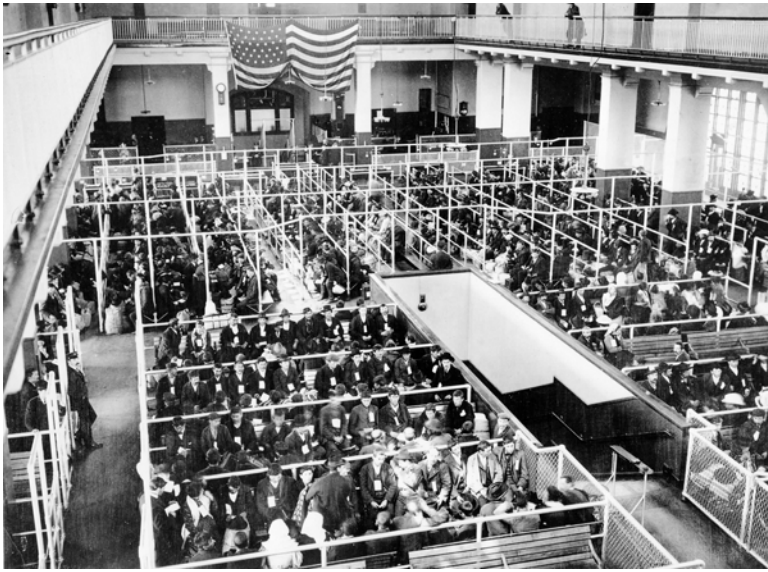


*Waiting in line... again. Photo: NPS.*

At 8:30, we were quick-marched out of the ship to the Customs Wharf and there ranged in six or seven long lines. All the officials were running and hustling, shouting out, "Come on!" "Hurry!" "Move along!" and clapping their hands. Our trunks were examined... and then we were quick-marched further to a waiting ferry-boat... All were thinking "Have I enough money?" "Shall I pass the doctor?"

At quarter-past twelve... We slowly filed up to a doctor who turned our eyelids inside out with a metal instrument. Another doctor scanned faces and hands for skin diseases... We passed into the vast hall of judgment and were... put into lines again, this time according to our nationality. It





*The Great Hall—what Graham calls “the hall of judgment.” Photo: NPS.*

was interesting to observe [see]... the mechanical obsession of the American People... It is not good to be like a hurrying, bumping, wandering piece of coal being mechanically guided to the sacks of its type and use, but such is the lot of the immigrant at Ellis Island.

The hall of judgment was crowned by two immense American flags. The centre, and indeed the great body of the hall, was filled with immigrants in their stalls... Up above was a visitors’ gallery where journalists and the curious might... talk about the melting-pot, and America...

Among the clerk’s offices, were exits; one gate led to Freedom and New York, another to *quarantine*, a third to the railway ferry, a fourth to the... place where unsuitable emigrants are imprisoned until there is a ship to take them back to their native lands.

At half-past two, I gave particulars [details] of myself and showed the coin I had, and was passed. “Have you ever been arrested?” asked the inspector... Well, yes, I had. I had been arrested four or five times. In Russia you can’t escape that... “Are you willing to live in subordination to [follow] the laws of the United States?” “Yes.”

At three in the afternoon I stood in another ferry-boat and with a crowd of approved immigrants [arrived in] the City of New York... That is what it feels like to pass the Last Day and still believe in Heaven, to pass Ellis Island and still believe in America.



*Lining up for the ferry to leave Ellis Island. Photo: NPS.*

What did the immigration officials at Ellis Island want to know about the new arrivals before they allowed them to enter America (name three different things)? Do you think this is fair?

Why does Graham compare his experience at Ellis Island to a lump of coal falling through chutes and into a sack?



## Post-Visit Extension: Create a Student Oral History Project

Reading an oral history makes history real for students. They “meet” real people who lived through historical events. An even richer experience is for students to conduct their own oral history interviews with a subject—to meet people *literally*. Gathering oral histories also helps students gain both content and skills in a rewarding, provocative manner.

From elementary school to graduate school, students have participated in oral history programs across the U.S. Creating a student oral history program, however, demands a serious commitment from teachers and students alike. Luckily, educators can draw from over thirty years of experience to design a program that best fits your students’ needs and interests.

An excellent source is *Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians: An Anthology of Oral History Education* by Barry A. Lanman and Laura M. Wendling (2005). Teachers give advice on how to organize the project, what language can help teachers to gain administrative support for the project and how to assess student work.

In his essay “The Oral History Experience,” Lanman outlines six important steps in planning what he calls an “oral history experience” for students:

- Developing *process* goals and standards (what steps students need to take)
- Developing *product* goals and standards (what students produce at the end)
- Curricular assessment (what standards the project will cover)
- Resource assessment (where students can go for interviews)
- Training and experience (what do they—and you—need to know beforehand)
- Developing a student evaluation (how to rate student work)

Oral histories require trust between the subject and the interviewer. The Oral History Association has adopted a list of principles and standards, including “respect to interviewers” and “respect to the public and the profession.” While eighth graders may not be held to the same rigor as graduate students, the basic responsibilities to the subject are the same: respect, courtesy and accuracy. For example, if the school intends to place the interview on the Internet or in a publication, the subject must sign a consent form prior to the interview that makes this explicit.



## New York State Core Curriculum, Grade 8

From **Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum**, 1999

**Unit III, *Industrialization of the United States***

- Immigration, 1850-1924: Impulses abroad, attractions here, “Americanization” process
- Reactions to “new” immigration: Diversity vs. nativism, impact on African-Americans, Literacy testing, the Quota Acts of 1921 and 1924.

**Unit V, *At Home and Abroad: Prosperity and Depression*:** World War I, Prosperity, Depression

**Unit VI, *U.S. in an Age of Global Crisis*:** Nazi Holocaust and U.S. reaction, Cold War, loss of China

**Unit VII, *World in Uncertain Times*:** New immigration patterns

From **English Language Arts Core Curriculum**, May 2005

**READING, Grade-specific performance indicators**

**Standard 1, *Information & Understanding*:**

- Apply thinking skills...to interpret data, facts...
- Compare and contrast information from a variety of different sources.
- Condense, combine or categorize new information from one or more sources.
- Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information.
- Make, confirm or revise predictions.

**Standard 2, *Literary Response & Expression*:** Identify social, cultural contexts ... to understand...

**Standard 3, *Critical Analysis & Evaluation*:** Evaluate the validity and accuracy of information.

**Standard 4, *Social Interaction*:** Consider the age, gender... and cultural traditions of the writer.

**LISTENING, Grade-specific performance indicators**

**Standard 1, *Information & Understanding*:**

- Recall significant ideas and details...
- Recognize that the speaker’s voice and delivery impact communication.

**Standard 4, *Social Interaction*:**

- Respect the age, gender, social position, and cultural traditions of the speaker.
- Listen for more than one level of meaning, articulated and unspoken.

**WRITING, Grade-specific performance indicators**

**Standard 1, *Information & Understanding*:**

- Take research notes...
- Use ... graphic organizers...
- Include relevant and exclude irrelevant information.
- Use paraphrase and quotation correctly.

**Standard 2, *Literary Response & Expression*:** Write original literary texts to...sequence events to advance a plot; use action, conflict, climax, falling action and resolution.

**SPEAKING, Grade-specific performance indicators**

**Standard 1, *Information & Understanding*:** Contribute to group discussions.

**Standard 2, *Literary Response & Expression*:** Present original literary texts...

**Standard 3, *Critical Analysis & Evaluation*:** Express opinions and judgments about information...



## For Further Research

### Literacy-Based Learning: Books Students Can Read

NOTE: *Sections of these books may not be appropriate for all readers.*

- *In the Shadow of Liberty: The Chronicle of Ellis Island* by Edward Corsi, 1935. Ellis Island's former U.S. Commissioner was himself an Ellis Island immigrant from Italy.
- *On the Trail of the Immigrant* and *The Immigrant Tide* by Edward A. Steiner, 1906 & 1909.
- *One Life is Not Enough* by Barbara Barondess MacLean, 1986. Born in Brooklyn, the citizenship of this stage and screen actress saved her Russian family from the Revolution.
- *Motl the Cantor's Son* by Sholem Aleichem. Delightful short stories about Jewish immigrants, including a vivid description of detention on "Ella's Island."
- *Brown Girl, Brownstones* by Paule Marshall, 1959. A novel about an immigrant from Barbados.

### Ellis Island Books for Teachers and Students

- *Ellis Island Interviews: In Their Own Words* by Peter Morton Coen, 1997. Many more selections from the Ellis Island Oral History Project, with interviewer questions edited out.
- *America Begins in New York: A Peopling of New York City—A Teachers' Resource Manual on Immigration*. Dozens of primary sources, with extensive teacher tips on how to use them.
- *Ellis Island: Echoes of a Nation's Past*, ed. by Susan Jonas. Large book with historic photos.
- *Ellis Island: An Illustrated History of the Immigrant Experience*, ed. by Fred Wasserman, 1991. Similar to the above book, but with more about the post-immigration experience.

### Having Students Conduct Their Own Oral Histories

- *Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Histories: An Anthology of Oral History Education*, ed. by Barry A. Lanman and Laura M. Wendling, 2006. Includes how-to essays for teachers.
- *To Feel As Our Ancestors Did: Collecting and Performing Oral Histories* by Daniel A. Kelin II, 2005. Students interview their elders and convert them to well-rehearsed performances.
- *Oral History in the Secondary School Classroom* by Barry Lanman & George Mehaffy, 1988.
- *Life Songs: Middle School Students as Oral Historians* by Frances Corvasce (Macko), 1993.

### Web Sites

<http://www.nps.gov/stli> National Park Service website for the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

<http://learning.turner.com/efts/ellis/> Commercial website. More oral histories, primary sources.

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/> Textbook company uses oral histories to give students a "tour" through the process of immigration at Ellis Island.

[http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/immigration\\_set2.html](http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/immigration_set2.html)  
Library of Congress "American Memory" website. On-line exhibits; images, maps, documents.

<http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/> Immigration statistics by year.

<http://www.archives.gov/northeast/nyc/> National Archives – New York website.





*Lining up for the ferry to leave Ellis Island. Photo: NPS.*

